

Timeline

1894

Democrats toppled from power by the Fusion coalition of Populists (disgruntled Democrats) and Republicans (69 to 49 in the House, 41 to 9 in the Senate); black Republican voters are important to the political upheaval

1895

Legislature begins dismantling Democratic machine – making government more representative and returning local self-government

1896

More political upheaval – General Assembly: House = 39 Populists, 54 Republicans, 24 Democrats and Senate = 25 Populists, 18 Republicans, 7 Democrats; election of Daniel Russell as first Republican governor since Reconstruction; Democratic control of cities such as Wilmington, Raleigh, Goldsboro, New Bern and Elizabeth City overturned by legislature; law amending Wilmington and New Bern city charters making city elections more democratic with Governor holding power to appoint one alderman from each ward to the Wilmington Board of Aldermen

March 25, 1897

Wilmington municipal election results in Board of Aldermen composed of 6 Republicans, 3 Democrats, 1 Silver party; Republican Silas P. Wright (a carpet-bagger) elected mayor and Board appointed Populist John R. Melton as chief of police; G.Z. French made Chief Deputy Sheriff of New Hanover County

Democrats elected to Board of Aldermen persuaded not to qualify; defeated mayor William N. Harris and six of the Democratic members of his Board of Aldermen challenge the act of 1897 as unconstitutional and the election as invalid; a third group claims to be legitimate Board

April 1897

Court hearing on challenge to act of 1897 by Harris; Judge J.D. McIver ruled act unconstitutional; Wright appealed decision to state Supreme Court

September 1897

Chief Justice William T. Faircloth and Supreme Court reversed Superior Court's decision; Wright and new Fusion Board of Aldermen gain full control of city affairs

6-12 months prior to November 10, 1898

Conspiracy developed by white citizens of Wilmington bent on maintaining white supremacy to perform a political coup, said to have originated with nine influential citizens (the "Secret Nine"); development of a citywide protective campaign to be coordinated with Democrat's statewide white supremacy movement for the 1898 election